

PRECOLONIAL GOLD MINING AND THE STATE IN THE AKAN REGION: WITH A CRITIQUE OF THE TERRAY HYPOTHESIS¹

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The search for theoretical insights into the formation of centralized states in precolonial West Africa has a long tradition. From the early diffusionist notions of Frobenius and Delafosse and the environmental hypotheses of Bovill, Forde, and others, we have moved to the more sophisticated comparative studies of Stevenson (who has drawn attention to the importance of population size and density), Morton-Williams (emphasizing control over long-distance trade routes), and Goody, who, in a complex hypothesis, has stressed among other factors the importance of military organization and technology in maintaining control over large numbers of people. Vansina, Thomas, and Mauny, in a penetrating comment (1964,

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87-88), noted how commercial elements might affect the rise of centralized states by creating organizations which could serve as models for the institutions of government. It has been only recently, however, that Africanists have begun to look closely at the economic and financial foundations of African kingdoms. Among recent studies worth mentioning are those by Marion Johnson, Robin Law, and Kwame Arhin. To these must be added those of the French school of Marxist social scientist—Meillassoux, Terray, and Coquery-Vidrovitch—who have attempted to expand and refine the original schema of Marx and Engels for pre-capitalist societies in the search for an archetypal African mode or modes of production. Out of these studies has come much interesting debate and stimulus for further research, but it must be said that few of them are free from serious flaws, and that the formulation of a general or widely applicable model showing the connections between state organization and underlying systems of production remains elusive. We need further case studies of particular states and sectors of the economy to trace out connections between production and governmental appropriation of “surplus.”

The present paper is a preliminary survey of the evidence in published literature, documentary sources and oral tradition rather than a definitive study of precolonial gold mining in Ghana in all of its dimensions. Detailed historical and ethnographic data on many of the early Akan states is still very meager. Collection and publication of oral traditions has been slow. Full-scale political histories of the major states (along the lines of Wilks for Asante or Kwamenah-Poh for Akwapem) are still few in number. A similar point can be made about the reconstruction of the economic histories of specific Akan states and of the general economic history of the Gold Coast for the pre-colonial period. Considering its importance in the history of the country, it is surprising that more has not been written on gold mining and the gold trade. We know a good deal about the location and structure of auriferous rock formations, and something about mining sites and the major trade routes along which gold was transported. Much has been written about the uses of gold in Akan art work and as currency. We know much less about quantities of gold mined and exported during specific periods, or about the relationship of gold mining to hunting, fishing, trade, and agriculture. We know little about the use of “slave” versus free labor in mining, or the methods used by ruling authorities to acquire gold, which is the central topic of this paper.

One note of caution: from the emphasis in this essay on gold, it should not be inferred that the writer is unaware of other features of state formation which may be of equal or greater importance; nor is he suggesting that the presence of gold mines was a sufficient condition for the consoli-

dation of chieftaincies and the emergence of centralized states. (There were, for example, some auriferous areas in the greater Akan region where state structures were weak or entirely absent.)

BACKGROUND: THE NORTHERN GOLD TRADE AND THE EARLY STATES OF BANDA AND BONO-TECHIMAN

As background, it is necessary to consider some of the early records of gold mining and the origins of the Akan political system on the northern forest fringe (or Brong-Ahafo region) of what is today Ghana. The rise to prominence about 1450 of the pre-state of Banda and the famous market town of Bighu (Be'o) on the outer margins of the forest zone can be correlated with the regularization of overland gold trade from the Akan region to the bend of the Niger via two main routes: (1) northwest through Bouna and Bob-Dioulasso, or (2) directly north along the Black Volta through Bole, Wa, Walembale, Safane and thence to Jenne, where the gold was exchanged for salt, textiles and other products of the north. Bighu served as the main staging post for gold mined in the hills and river banks along the middle reaches of the Black Volta (Wilks, 1961, 8). One rough estimate puts the northern gold trade of Akan states at an annual average of about 2,500 ounces from the late fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, we know little about the origins or structure of the Banda polity, which are shrouded in obscurity, beyond that it was involved in the gold trade, was probably served by the Bighu market, and that its society was pluralistic, being based on an infusion of one of the earliest waves of Manding traders (Wangara or proto-Juula) from the Niger basin with various other Abbron groups (Brongs), plus the matrilineal ruling group called the Nafana (related to the Senufu) and Guan-speaking peoples from Nkoranza (Goody, 1964, 194–196, 199). Still, even on the basis of the slender evidence available, it is possible to detect a number of fundamental causal elements which became characteristic of other early states that subsequently evolved in the savannah lands of the Volta River and Komoé watersheds: (1) the rise of a central market town with two main sections (one for indigenes, another for foreigners), linked to a wider trading network of similar towns also inhabited by Muslim (Wangara or Manding) merchants (Levtzion, 1968, 4); (2) engrossment of both wealth and political power by a royal lineage through control (either partial or exclusive) of production from adjacent gold fields; (3) incorporation by the state of a wider territory through protection and regulation of trade routes and exaction of tribute through duties and tolls on caravan trade,

coupled with (4) the creation of governmental organization and specialized offices probably transmitted from external places of origin, such as the empires of the western Sudan. Among the early Muslim settlers in the more northerly Mossi and Dagomba states were members of clans which had served as jurists and advisers to the court at Timbuctu; and it seems probable that a similar process occurred in states further south (Wilks, 1972, 353–355).

None of this is to exaggerate the importance of gold mining and Juula trader elements. Clearly, an effective military component had to be added to lay a solid basis for territorial control and revenue collection. According to tradition, Bighu was wracked by civil war as a consequence of Brong resentment against the wealth of Muslims in the city, and this may also have led to a decline in gold-producing structures. During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, control over the Banda gold fields was contested by the rival Asante and Gyaman kingdoms (see Meyerowitz, 1952, 46–47; Wilks, 1972, 413–455).

It is generally recognized that the earliest true Akan state was that of Bono-Mansu (or Bono) in the Techiman district of what is today the Brong-Ahafo region about 100 miles northwest of Kumasi. Oral tradition first collected by Meyerowitz suggesting that the earliest rulers of the pre-state were Mo people who migrated from the north, and that the foundations of the monarchy date from the late thirteenth century must, however, be treated with skepticism. A counter-hypothesis by Effah-Gyamfi (1974: 221) indicates that the earliest ancestors of the Bono ruling group were indigenous to the region. Another view put forward by Levtzion is that the emergence of the Bono-Mansu kingdom paralleled rather than predated the growth of Bighu as a trade center (Levtzion, 1968, 6–10 194–5). Subject to less dispute are two points pertinent to the present study: that the later consolidation of the monarchy was based, first, on royal control over the extraction of alluvial gold from the banks of the nearby Tain and Tano rivers, and, second, that the monarch attracted western Sudanic traders for the purchase of both gold and kola nuts, a pattern that seems to have developed from the reign of King Obunumankoma about the middle of the fifteenth century. This same king is credited with creating the *Sanna* or Royal Treasury, instituting gold dust as a currency, and originating the system of weighing gold by metallic weights inscribed with the symbols of stool authority, a device later adopted by other Akan states.

Over several generations gold came to occupy a central place, not only in the economy, but in the politics and culture of the kingdom. The Bono state, at the height of its power, set standards for the traditions of kingship that, modified and elaborated, became characteristic of later Akan states, many of which traced their royal lineages back to original emigrants from

the Techiman area. It was here that the rituals and panoply of sacred kingship, symbolized by the use of golden regalia, were first instituted—state umbrellas, state swords, palanquins and, above all, the stool—regalia which became the prototypes for all subsequent Akan states. Here, as in the centralized kingdoms of the forest zone later, a powerful army and a well-stocked treasury became the two main bulwarks of state power.

Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about methods of mining in these early Akan states. There are suggestions that improvements in gold-mining technology took place over time through the importation of Manding specialists, probably from the Bure region of the Upper Niger, together with the use of slaves under the control of an official called the Superintendent of Mines. The wealth and prosperity of the kingdom were greatly strengthened by the Bono conquest of the neighboring Banda region (c. 1630–1640) and the incorporation of the Banda hills gold fields into the Bono-Mansu production system. Finally, it seems beyond dispute that the military campaign by Asante armies under Opoku Ware north into the Brong area (1722–1723) was motivated by the Asantehene's compelling drive to gain control of the gold resources of the successor state of Bono-Techiman. According to Wilks, the confiscation after conquest of the entire Techiman royal treasury "revolutionized" the Asante financial system. (For details see Meyerowitz, 1952: 29–44; Wilks, 1972: 425–29.)

THE TERRAY HYPOTHESIS

A provocative hypothesis concerning the relationship between underlying modes of production and state formation in pre-colonial West Africa has recently been suggested by Emmanuel Terray, who makes a definite causal connection between the accumulation of state surplus and traditional gold mining which he then relates to an underlying "African mode of production." The nub of his argument is that the wealth and political power of the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Brong (Abron) state of Gyaman derived from a special slave-based sector of the economy managed directly by the state and concentrated in mineral production. Although he takes Engels' classic definition of the state as a "machine for the oppression of one class by another" as a premise, Terray differs from other Marxist writers on Africa, such as Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1969) and Samir Amin (1972), who have emphasized royal monopolization of long-distance trade as the major economic base for the accumulation of surplus and hence of state power. Attempting to bring African history more closely into line with Marx's original formulations in the *Grundrisse* on the epochs in the evolution of economic formations, Terray

argues that Coquery-Vidrovitch and Amin in their earlier writings failed to emphasize the central importance of "slave labor," both in the relations of production and as a source of state surplus in a number of pre-colonial African economies. Drawing his evidence from the kingdom of Gyaman, he points out that long-distance trade was carried on primarily by Mande-Juula who, although supreme in trade, were neither the dominant political class nor subject to the kind of trade controls or imposts by the Brong rulers from which significant revenues could have been derived (Terray, 1974: 321). Although Terray uses Gyaman as his prime example, he believes his analysis to be true for Asante also, and by implication for other states of the Akan as well, quoting K.Y. Daaku to the effect that "no Akan state monopolized [trade] to the exclusion of its subjects" (Daaku, 1971: 172).

Dismissing causal explanations which disagree with his own, Terray then passes on to the question: "If aristocracies did not draw their wealth and power from exercising control over long-distance exchange or *from* tribute . . . where did this wealth and power come from?" (ibid., 325). Agriculture is apparently ruled out as a significant source for state surplus (ibid., 321). The answer, he concludes, must be found in royal control over mineral production. To demonstrate this point, he makes a distinction between the kinds of labor required for the two major types of gold mining: (1) alluvial gold extraction from the water-courses which was open to free labor, and (2) pit mining or digging for reef gold, which, he claims, was so laborious a process that it required gangs of specialists working in shifts, which in turn, he argues, could only be fulfilled by slaves (ibid., 327-28). The only persons who owned slaves in sufficient numbers for large-scale mining, he contends, were kings and chiefs, principally the Gyamanhene himself. And it was the surplus wealth extracted mainly from royal mines which provided the ruling classes of Gyaman and Asante with the wealth needed to organize centralized state systems, a further element in which was the centralized armies also manned by slaves. All this, he argues, represented a radical transformation. The earlier stateless authority structure of the traditional kin-based social system and labor units of the household were too dispersed to organize such mining and military activities. The core of the centralized state structure of both Gyaman and Asante, he implies, was close control over men based on "the establishment of bonds of direct personal dependence." Because captivity and slavery were the most effective ways of achieving such dependence, "the functioning of the entire social formation was organized around them" (ibid., 331).

The rest of this paper will analyze the connection between gold mining and the consolidation of state power in the kingdoms of the Akan region.

MINING TECHNIQUES AND THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOR

From a casual reading of some colonial histories of the Gold Coast it might be supposed that traditional gold mining was limited to two or three major states, notably Wassa, Akyem and Asante; but this is a mistaken notion based on the location of the more successful European corporate mining ventures. Actually, indigenous gold mining had been carried on since at least the 1400s in a large number (perhaps most) of the Akan regions of settlement. Oral tradition and early Dutch and English sources frequently mention Ahanta, Aowin, Apollonia (Nzima), Sefwi as well as Wassa in the western region; Denkyira, Assin, Twifo and a number of the coastal states in the central region; plus Akyem-Kotoku and Akyem-Abuakwa (which were known for the purest gold) and, to a limited extent, Kwahu in the eastern region. Rich supplies continued to be found in Bona-Techiman, Banda, Gyaman and various other parts of Brong-Ahafo and the northern region. There is no need here to go into the geology of these lands. Described simply, gold-bearing reefs derived from granitic and porphyritic intrusions into the massive pre-Cambrian Birrimian and Tarkwaian rock systems which underlie more than one-sixth of that part of modern Ghana lying south and east of the Kwahu escarpment. From these basic rock systems there was great diffusion of ore over geologic time into upper sedimentary layers, so that early explorers and traders reported that there were few regions where existing river beds or the ancient river sites and their surrounding hillsides were not impregnated with gold dust.

Methods of gold extraction varied between regions from the most rudimentary to fairly sophisticated methods based on locally developed iron tools. (At least part of the explanation for subtle changes over time is traceable to contact with Europeans along with the diffusion of local innovations.) Although we know a good deal about tools and digging methods, we know much less about the organization of labor and the relationship between gold mining and other sectors of local production (agriculture, tree crops, hunting) in Akan communities. The major problem with Terray's state-controlled slave labor model is simply lack of data to sustain the hypothesis. As more evidence comes in, we may be able to improve our understanding. For the present, however, the burden of proof is on those who argue for direct expropriation of surplus from mining by use of state-controlled slaves. The following description of production methods is based on fragmentary evidence gathered from a number of different Akan states.

Most studies confine their descriptive summaries of gold-mining

techniques to two main types: (1) washing or “panning” for alluvial gold in rivers and seashores, and (2) deep digging or shaft mining. To these it is necessary to add another type often overlooked, or confused with the other two in many accounts, namely (3) shallow-pit alluvial gold mining from dry surface deposits. In his 1974 article (pp. 327–28) Terray oversimplifies to the point of error when he says that there was a clear-cut division between alluvial or placer mining in river beds and shaft mining because the latter was reserved for slave labor. There was some division of labor in traditional mining and extraction but mainly along lines of sex rather than according to “free” (surface mining) and “slave” labour (deep digging) as Terray asserts. Thus panning for alluvial gold along stream beds and coastal shorelines was mainly the work of women and young boys. Young men might wade into shallow stream beds or plunge into eddying pools at the base of waterfalls to scoop up gold-laden sand in brass or calabash bowls. Women would flock to the seashore after a heavy rain (Bosman, 1705, 80–81). Sand carried down from the interior deposited at the sides of river estuaries was said to be a lucrative source of placer gold on the coast. But the process of separation was extremely time-consuming. It required repeated washings—perhaps as many as five or six of a given amount of river-bed gravel—to isolate a tiny amount of fine gold. In a series of stages and by a rotation or “rocking” of a calabash bowl or special wooden trays, women would gradually wash away the detritus until only fine grains of gold remained. The last or smallest tray which they used might be stained black, better to reflect the fine grains of gold. Afterwards they would dry out what remained in the sun or over a fire (Meredith, 1812: 119–120; Adams, 1823: 48). To wash as much as 50 pounds of sand or soil a day was considered a maximum effort. From this they might make anywhere from half a dollar (2s. 6d.) to two dollars daily profit (Burton and Cameron, II (1882): 112–113).

Surface shallow-pit excavation was the commonest form of indigenous gold mining and probably the principal source of the gold dust and nuggets produced in the Akan states and exported over the centuries. The surface was opened either in small holes, dug by individuals, or in larger excavations such as trenches or broad pits (sometimes eight feet in diameter) with entire families working together on the project. These pits usually were no more than three to ten feet deep. Miners found little difficulty in getting at the sedimentary deposits of fine gold and nuggets (where they existed) which underlay the upper strata of topsoil, laterite, clay, and gravel. Experienced European miners reported that the alluvial gold of the Gold Coast lay much closer to the surface, typically, than was the case in the other gold fields of the world they had worked in.

Ideal excavation sites were the lands bordering rivers and streams and the deposits of dried-out gulches or antediluvian river beds. Travelers

through Wassa in the western Gold Coast and Akyem in the eastern region found the land on either side of well-traveled footpaths literally "honeycombed" with small holes averaging about two feet in diameter into which the unwary might easily fall during the hours of darkness (Skertchley, 1879: 277; Burton and Cameron 1883, II: 111, 114, 294–295, 348–349). Accounts recorded by Bowdich in the early nineteenth century make it fairly clear that small surface holes were also the most common types of digging in Gyaman (Bowdich, 1819: 169), not the deep and systematically excavated shafts for reef gold, which required backbreaking slave labor, the sort of mining Terray thinks was the dominant source of state wealth (1974: 327).

Especially valuable evidence for the Kyebi area of Akyem-Abuakwa comes from the reports of Basel missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century (report by Müller, June 14, 1881: Basel Mission records). From these we learn that mining was mainly a seasonal activity concentrated in the three or four months at the very end of the dry season and the first part of the rainy season (approximately December through April) because the extraction of alluvial or sedimentary gold was easiest just after the ground had been dampened and the gold deposits of streams loosened by the first downpours. After April, as the rainy season reached its peak, deep mine shafts became flooded and the perforated landscapes, where shallow-pit mining had been carried on, turned into quagmires, making most kinds of solid-earth mining impossible. December–March mining had the additional advantage of falling between the harvesting and planting seasons for what were the staple food crops in most areas (maize, yams).

When collated with oral tradition and other contemporary sources, the Basel documents make it clear that mining in the Akan states was organized *mainly around the family group*. As will be explained in the next section, kings and chiefs controlled access to mining areas, and they exerted control over the distribution of proceeds from gold mining; *but there is very little evidence that the states engaged in any substantial way in production itself*. At the height of the mining season, all the residents of entire villages—men, women and children—might leave their homes and journey to the richest mining districts. If these were some distance away, as was often the case, they would take provisions and belongings and set up camps near the gold fields for a number of weeks; in other instances, they would travel daily to and from their homes to the mines. Since a head of household would normally have several wives and many children living under his care (including nephews and nieces under the matrilineal system), a sizeable team of workers could be fielded as a part of the "family" or "kin-based mode of production." In addition, family work units might include a number of domestic slaves, but these were attached to and functioned as a part of the family group. In other words, slaves

supplemented the kin-based mode of production and did not constitute a separate and distinct labor force. Slaves performed the same tasks as ordinary members of the family group. If there was any division of labor in mining, it was based on age and sex, not on slave versus "free," as Terray asserts. As a general rule, men and older boys did the digging and breaking, women took charge of the washing and separation of gold dust from earth and gravel. (The preceding summary is based on several accounts, especially report by Riis in *Basel Mission Reports*, 1840, Pt. 3, pp. 103 ff; K.Y. Daaku, *Oral Tradition, Denkyira*, pp. 133, 151, 215, 252; also *Oral Traditions of Assin-Twifo: Assin-Nyankumasi*, p. 13.)

To the two types of mining already mentioned, it is necessary to add a third, "hard rock" or deep shaft digging for reef gold, which, contrary to popular European belief, was also an aspect of traditional mining in the Akan region long before the advent of mechanized systems of production. Valuable formations of vein-gold might be discovered by sheer luck, by recognizing peculiarities of the surrounding surface vegetation, or by following the course of an outcrop. The depth and size of shafts varied greatly according to the geologic terrain, the kinds of earth encountered, the preferences of the miners, and the fluctuating levels of ground water. One common type of pit was the bottle-shaped opening—long and narrow at the top and neck but widening at the center and bottom—where miners chipped away at the cavelike sides and ceiling. Most excavations ran from 10 to 20 feet in depth. However, there are numerous cases in the records of shafts which ran to a depth of 80 to 100 feet, and occasionally even more (Rømer, 1760, quoted in Nøregard, 1966: 106). Such deep shafts were generally of the "chimney pipe" type. Workers descended by use of bamboo ladders, foot and hand holes dug in the sides, or simply by opposing leg and back pressure against the walls. Much could be written about methods of deep-shaft mining, about the tools used, how shafts were sometimes widened into large chambers or galleries at the lower depths (allowing employment for as many as thirty or more workers), and about methods of crushing and pulverization; but these technical matters will be dealt with elsewhere.

While it would be wrong to believe those accounts of travelers which suggest that little or no reef gold was mined or that African miners were unwilling or unable to cut ore from hard rock, it would also be erroneous to exaggerate the quantities of gold retrieved from deep-reef mining or to attribute primacy to such mining throughout the entire Akan region. First, there were definite physical constraints against deep digging beyond a certain level. Presence of ground water, lack of ventilation, and cave-ins were frequent problems. Second, the sinking of deep shafts could involve a considerable gamble: much time could be lost following false leads. If a group of miners did not strike pay dirt by at least 20 feet, a shaft was more

often than not abandoned. Third, much of the gold recovered from deep-shaft mining was from the softer sedimentary layers, siliceous layers or disintegrated portions of the reef formation rather than from the hardest reef or banket. In other words, not all deep shafts were concerned with mining from hard conglomerate or quartz reefs; work was often similar to that in the shallower alluvial diggings. Fourth, even if miners were fortunate enough to strike a rich vein, much time and labor were required to produce the pure gold. Sometimes miners would penetrate very deep through the various sedimentary layers—topsoil, laterite, red sandy clay—only to find that access to the gold-bearing vein was blocked by a thick layer of impenetrable rock (fieldnotes from the 1870s, W.F. Holmes, 1926: 90, 117). J. A. Skertchley, one of the most reliable nineteenth-century sources, pointed out that it required two able-bodied men working all day to cut out about one cubic foot of rock from a reef. For pulverization, washing and separation—which might require another two days—the labor of additional family members would be required (Skertchley, 1879: 278). There seems to be little doubt that on the occasions when a rich lode was struck, the returns by local standards could be considerable. Profitable, deep-shaft reef gold mining, however, appears to have been restricted to some of the richer districts of certain Akan states, particularly Wassa and Asante, and it is not at all clear whether all the auriferous states should be included in this group. Finally, and most important to the central argument here, *there is no evidence in the sources that deep-shaft and reef gold mining was monopolized by the state or that this type of mining was reserved in any monopolistic way for royal slaves as the Terray hypothesis maintains*. The typical work unit of production remained the family unit, sometimes working in cooperation with other families from the village.

This essay makes no claim to comprehend the organization of labor and the relations of production in all sectors of the precolonial Akan economy. Nor does the writer want to minimize the importance of various forms of bondage and personal dependence in the overall political, social, and economic context, matters which deserve full treatment in another study. It has become increasingly apparent that African internal or domestic slavery is an extremely complex topic which has only begun to be studied in the depth it deserves. Indeed, the definitions and classifications of various forms of African slavery are still topics for debate (see Miers and Kopytoff, 1977). Among the Akan, for example, there were different types of “slaves” and a complex variety of gradations in master-servant relationships. (Some “slaves,” for example, were chiefs who themselves owned large numbers of slaves.) There is also the unresolved question of the extent of assimilation of slaves within free families and their activities and roles in the wider host community. It will require intensive linguistic

and anthropological analysis before the organization of Akan domestic slavery can be understood. (For basic classifications see Rattray, 1929: 33–46.)

Based on the limited amount of available evidence, this paper argues that captives used in Akan traditional gold mining in most instances were household slaves working along with members of small family units. Admittedly, there are still gaps in our knowledge about the numbers, status, and productive output of slaves owned in large numbers by kings and chiefs. It would appear that the daily work routines of slaves varied considerably depending on whether the slave worked as a farmer, a skilled craftsman, soldier, or court functionary; also, of course, on the harshness or flexibility of particular masters. Much more needs to be learned about work loads and regimentation.

There is no question that forms of slavery or bondage existed in Akan society and culture and that slaves were employed in important ways not covered in this essay. The argument here is that slave labor as a production system occupied a restricted position in the economies of most of the Akan states rather than a central and dominating position as Terray and other recent interpreters have suggested. This paper also disputes the existence of a full-scale "slave mode of production" in a supposed state-controlled mining sector. While there are brief references in the literature to persons who mined directly for the king (described later in this paper), there is no reliable or detailed evidence to suggest that such miners were invariably or largely slaves, or that the practice was a major source of gold output; or that it was a major source of the state's acquisition of gold. Unless substantial evidence to the contrary is forthcoming, then the notion of a full-fledged "slave mode of production" in traditional gold mining misrepresents the actual process that took place. Perhaps the strongest argument against the Terray hypothesis is that most kings and chiefs did not need to rely on their own personal cadres of state miners because numerous alternative means of appropriating gold and other goods and services lay open to them.

LAND TENURE RELATIONSHIPS IN RELATION TO GOLD MINING AND THE APPROPRIATION OF "SURPLUS"

If it was not direct control over slave labor, what then were the most important institutional techniques used to siphon off surplus product from mining and agriculture used by the kingdoms of the Akan region? The answer is to be found in Akan land law and land tenure relationships. Surely any discussion of the connections between economic production

and political authority ought to scrutinize allocation and control over land, yet this is largely ignored in the Terray article. I would argue that there are two fundamental connections between production—whether of mineral or forest products—and the emergence of a ruling hierarchy: (1) the traditional obligation by family heads or farmer-occupiers to pay a portion of the usufruct to local stool authorities (*amanhene*); (2) the direct power of states to tax, which derived from both the traditional territorial controls of the ruler as well as from the kinship obligations of the people to him.

The nature and theory of Akan land law have been the subject of numerous detailed monographs by specialists (Allot, 1960; Bentsi-Enchill, 1964). Despite local variations we can note broad similarities in traditional principles of land tenure which explain arrangements in most of the pre-colonial Akan states. Fundamental are first, the concept of varying “clusters of rights” in land in contrast to the simplistic Euro-centric formula of “individual” versus “communal” ownership of the land, sometimes still found in the literature; and, second, the threefold classification of land into (1) “stool land,” (2) “family or lineage land” and (3) “individual land” (see Belfield, 1911: 481–601; Rattray, 1923: 220).

Traditionally, all settled land was either “stool land” or “family land.” It was basic to Akan land law that the ultimate ownership or “allodial interests” in all land within the boundaries of a state (*oman*) were vested in the entire community—ancestors, the living and the yet-to-be-born—with the king or chief serving as trustee. Failure to appreciate this lay behind the fundamental error of early colonial officials who assumed that so-called “unoccupied land” (held in reserve for bush fallow) had no owners. The right of a family to farm a particular parcel of land continuously might be based on an unbroken tradition of cultivation inherited from the first settlers who cleared the virgin forest or from interests in land conferred by chiefs on to those who arrived later.

The idea of multiple and overlapping interests (or “clusters of rights”) in land implies that we should look not to Euro-centric notions of land tenure relationships but rather to (1) the varying uses made of given parcels of land; (2) who had access to the land and what if any limitations were placed on that access; and (3) to the administrative rights exercised by the state which were those of allotment, regulation of economic pursuits and collection of a portion of the proceeds, depending on the uses. In earliest times, uncultivated tribal or stool land was generally open to settlement free of charge to any member of the matriline and probably even to strangers; but, gradually as populations grew more dense and/or the powers of kings and chiefs increased, stranger-farmers had to secure permission and perhaps pay a fee to the local ruler before commencing cultivation. Originally, “family land” and “individual land” (a concept that evolved over time) implied use rights over parcels of land rather than

outright "ownership" in the Western sense of the fee simple estate. But the difference between what Westerners would call "ownership" of the land and what Bentshi-Enchill (1965: 121) with reference to West Africa calls "proprietary occupancy" should not be exaggerated. For as he points out, not even the English law governing fee simple allowed for total and absolute individual ownership. And among the Akan the concept of individual "self-acquired land" with rights of heritability and transfer by sale was already recognized in the precolonial period. (Of course the key factor in the expansion of this class of land after about 1895 was undoubtedly the cultivation and investment in a permanent tree crop—cocoa—which conveyed more exclusive rights to the individual farmer.) Over other kinds of lands—those with wild forest crops (timber, kola, and rubber) and especially those containing minerals—the use rights of the total community and the administrative powers of the state continued to be strong up to and even during the colonial period.

The traditional controls exercised by kings and chiefs over access to the land and over distribution of produce from the land, are central to the argument in this essay. Although in the theory of Akan land law the responsibility of the *omanhene* has been described as that of "custodian" or "trustee" for the interests of his people, rather than that of owner, there are indications that in pre-colonial times the regulatory powers exercised by chiefs over the use of land and division of wealth from the land were much stronger than was the case in the twentieth century (Dickson, 1969: 76). This seems to have been especially true in the more centralized gold-producing states such as Asante, where the familiar adage that "the land belongs to the chief" had real meaning quite apart from its symbolic significance in reference to the trusteeship principle (Busia, 1951: 44). Similar controls existed in varying degree in other Akan gold-mining states. In a recent statement Yarak suggests that in the state of Wassa, control exercised by the paramount stool over allocations of land was so substantial that subordinate chiefs could be viewed as "fiefholders" of the paramount stool (Yarak, 1976: 21). Local inhabitants would normally receive permission to farm a portion of unoccupied stool land without the requirement of a regular payment; but they still might be liable to pay chiefs certain "customary obligations" which stemmed nonetheless from stool rights in land. These included a number of labor services as well as payments in money or in kind, communal labor on roads and other public works, payments in gold or produce at the time of important festivals, and a large number of special or emergency assessments.

The implications of these stool rights in land with respect to gold mining were highly significant for state wealth and power. Sarbah noted that particularly in the richly auriferous states of Wassa, Sefwi, Appollonia,

and Aowin, ownership of minerals was considered to be vested in the king's stool (Sarbah, 1906: 92). Anyone who extracted wealth from the land, local residents as well as strangers, had to seek permission from the local chief or headman and agree to pay him a portion of the proceeds. In many states, however, this rule applied only to strangers who came to mine gold and not to local villagers who could mine anywhere freely at will. Gold was extracted in two forms, gold dust and nuggets. The number of nuggets dug up in certain areas was quite large. Normally, stranger-miners had to pay over a one-third (*abusa*) share of all gold mined to the local stool authority and/or lineage head; local people would be required only to remit all nuggets. Oral interviews indicate that this was the major source of surplus (gold acquired by political right) for most chieftaincies and in most kingdoms (Daaku, *Oral Tradition: Denkyira*, 1970, 21–22, 96, 114–15, 132, 173, 274, 352; *Oral Traditions of Assin-Twifo*, 1969; Assin-Nyakumasi, 9, Assin-Akonfudi, 3).

There were, of course, numerous variations. In some states a king or chief might appropriate as much as one-half (*abuna* share system), or even more, of all gold mined by strangers. In practice, the one-third division of proceeds under the *abusa* system might work in one of several ways: one-third to the stranger-miner, one-third to the local family or lineage head, and one-third to the immediate local stool authority; or, one-third to the miner, one-third to the local subchief, and one-third to the paramount chief or *omanhene* (Dadson, 1969: 32). If certain tracts of auriferous land were deemed to lie within the "family land" of a particular king or royal lineage (a narrower concept than "stool lands"), then the right of the king or chief to a large share of the proceeds would be all the stronger. Similarly, stool interests in land created additional rules in many Akan states allowing for (1) absolute right of chiefs to ownership of all *treasure trove*; (2) a one-third to one-half interest in all ivory tusks collected, or large animals killed on tribal lands; and, frequently (3) right to a one-third share in the profits from forest products (palm oil, rubber, timber and kola nuts) collected (Sarbah, 1906: 74–75; Busia 1951: 44, 49, 54–57).

This by no means exhausts the ways stool rights in land provided material revenue to chiefs and kings amounting to a substantial portion of all gold mined. In addition to central government taxes, which remain to be described, there were a large number of other quasi-feudal aids and incidences which might be imposed on peasant producers by the king's agents. Thus, a member of the *oman* might have to pay a special assessment for the purchase of new stool regalia, be asked to help defray the expenses of a royal funeral, or make a special contribution in food at the time of the annual *Odwira* festival. Along the same lines, Sarbah describes for the state of Wassa Amenfi a custom known as *Tikororo*

whereby the king was entitled to a measure of gold to be paid from each mining shaft during certain days of the mining season (Sarbah, 1906: 74). Closely related to this was labor service—persons subject to periodic communal labor not only for the upkeep of roads and bridges, but also for tilling the lands of the king or chief. In Denkyira as well as Wassa, it was said that during the height of the mining season people were forced to devote one day of labor per week to dig gold directly for the king (Daaku, *Oral Tradition Denkyira*, 54, Captain A. Moloney to Governor Strahan, March 17, 1875; Encl. in Strahan to Carnarvon, March 18; *P.P.* (1875), [c. 13432], Vol. II, Part 2. Boyle, 1874: 35–36). Distorted accounts of this kind of obligatory labor by European travelers may well have been responsible for the apocryphal stories about use of “thousands of slaves in mining” under direct control of the royal bureaucracy. Oral tradition as well as published sources emphasize that this practice stemmed from the paramount ruler’s traditional control over the land rather than from his owning hordes of slaves. The miners were in the main ordinary peasant producers not the king’s personal slaves. It rightly has been called a system of *corvée* rather than of slavery.

What was the juridical principle underlying this power exercised by kings and chiefs to acquire labor services and produce? Whether such material receipts got by paramount chiefs in the African context could be construed as “rents” has been raised by a number of scholars (Sarbah, 1906: 66–69, 73) and discussed in recent symposia on African economic history. But use of this term raises certain objections: namely, that under African customary land law, socioeconomic conditions of land use were too variable to meet the strict test for “rent” in the classic legal sense of a contractual obligation for regular payments to a landlord for the right of occupancy. Sarbah, for example, appears to base his conclusions mainly on Fanti or coastal experience, where landholding was more commercialized and individualized. Instead, the land in most pre-colonial Akan states was conceived as belonging to the community as a whole with the stoolholder entitled only to that portion of the produce of usufruct that was due him as sovereign. In other words, the administrative rights and interests of chiefs which entitled them to material receipts from the land co-existed with the use rights of lineages and families in his *oman*. There remains the matter of the *omanhene*’s exceptionally strong control over mineral lands (“wealth from beneath the soil”) and the profits therefrom, where the quasi-feudal elements are difficult to ignore. Here I would argue that the total bundle of stool interests in gold mining—the right to impose *corvée*, the claim to all nuggets, and right to a portion of the proceeds (in some instances almost unlimited) through the *abusa* system, not to mention the revenues from a large number of taxes, most closely

approximates the concept of *seigniorage* or royalty by one of several definitions: either (1) a share of the proceeds paid to a proprietor by those doing business under some right belonging to him; or (2) more specifically, a tax paid to the crown out of profits from royal lands or mines.

DENKYIRA

Gold was important in the political formation of Denkyira, the first of the great centralized states of the Akan forest zone, which rose to regional prominence in the seventeenth century. The founders of Denkyira, known as the Adawufo people, trace their origins back to a place called Nkyiraa in Brong-Ahafo (Meyerowitz, 1952: 29) which underscores the importance of the northern forest fringe as a population dispersal area and as a center for transmission of important cultural elements in the Akan historical tradition. The emergence of Denkyira coincides with the latter stages of the northern gold trade and the beginning of Akan trading contacts with Europeans on the Coast. Although the details are unknown, the beginnings of the modern Denkyira state probably can be traced back to about the mid-1600s when it emerged from the general environs of Akani (or Accany), the ancient inland kingdom centered on the confluence of the Pra, Ofin, and the Birim rivers, and which probably included some of the territory later controlled by Adansi, Assin, and Akyem as well as Denkyira.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars about Denkyira chronology. Kumah places the origins of the state as early as 1585, and reading backwards from the death of the eighth king and allowing a 15-year span per reign, contends that the first wars of expansion were fought by the seventh king in the 1660s. Johnson calls this "the myth of Denkyira early origins" and argues that we have no firm data for the existence of the Denkyira state before the 1680's (Kumah, 1966: 34; M. Johnson, personal communication, March 1978). Whatever the precise dating, it was more than coincidence that the heartland of what became upper Denkyira state lay along the southern bank of the Ofin River (near the sites of Dunkwa, Nyinawusa and Diaso) one of the richest alluvial gold regions in the whole of the central forest zone. It seems probable that gold dust from the Akani region was first exported along with that from Bono-Techiman northward to Jenne via the Upper Volta route as early as the sixteenth century. Kumah (1966: 34) suggests that the forerunners of Denkyira, along with those of Asante, initially played a part in the transport of gold to the north; and that later, after the decline of the northern trade, the Denkyiras established trading chains along the route from

Bighu, Tafo, Adansi and Assin to the coast before developing their own gold mines and formal state structure. Following oral tradition, Daaku states that the Denkyirahene, Boamponsem I, established the base for the Denkyira Empire. Also that it appears likely that the growth of the original capital site of Abankeseeso (or Bansa) (c. 1680–94), which had an excellent strategic location astride trade routes, was concurrent with increased control by the Denkyira kings over profits from gold mining and the gold trade (Daaku, *Oral Tradition*, 1970: 4, 14).

The definitive history of Denkyira has yet to be written. Little is yet known about its early administration or economic history. Evidence drawn from Denkyira oral tradition and from other Akan states suggests that a collection of matrilineages initially gave allegiance to a centralized kingship under a single royal matriclan, which came about in response to various internal and external pressures such as population growth, overland trade to the North, and especially contact with Europeans on the coast. Like Bono-Techiman before and Asante after, Denkyira created an elaborate court ceremonial wreathed in a regalia of sacred objects—the state stool (*Abankamdwa*), the mace (*Wieme*) and the executioner's sword (*Sasatia*)—which expressed the mystical origins of the state. The framework of political offices was essential, particularly those of basic military organization crucial to state survival—defense and the waging of war. The main offices in the wing-chief system were (1) the advance guard (*Adontendom*); (2) the right-wing (*Akumatire* or *Nifa*); (3) left-wing (*Kyeremfem* or *Benkum*); and (4) rear guard (the *Kyidom*). The men who commanded these units (known collectively as the *Osafohene*) combined military and civil powers and controlled substantial territory surrounding major administrative towns, such as Dunkwa, Mfuom, Diaso and Kukwa. Under each top official there existed tiers of divisional chiefs and village headmen, each advised by councils. Each town regarded itself as a member of a particular wing. A similar wing-chief organization was used in other Akan states and indicates how a confederacy of military chieftaincies might be welded into a centralized kingdom by a skillful balancing of internal forces.

Apart from food crop cultivation, gold mining was the most important economic activity in old Denkyira. From oral traditions collected by the late Kwame Daaku, we can perceive the methods of gold extraction, relations of production and appropriation of “surplus” from gold mining described above. Informants reported that gold mining in Denkyira was a “free” activity which anyone could engage in. The main labor group in production was the extended family unit, which generally included the family head, his wives, other adult members, children, grandchildren, and a few slaves. There is no mention of any mining by the king's slaves. The

open nature of gold mining is also brought out in these reports: if a man found an especially rich source of gold he would return to tell his village about it and "the whole community would set out to prospect for gold. However, the actual work was done individually or by families" (*Oral Tradition*, 1970: 132, 151, 215, 252).

Ordinarily, the residents of a particular district could mine in that area without seeking special permission from the ruling stool chief or without paying him a share of the proceeds. In most cases, it seems that only stranger-miners had to pay over the customary one third (*abusa*) share. On the other hand some informants said that *all* miners (wherever they came from) had to pay over a portion of their profits as a gift or royalty to the stool (*Oral Tradition*, 1970: 114–115, 173). Informed elders confirmed that gold nuggets became the automatic property of the paramount ruler, and in addition, that special days were set aside for mining for the chief or king (*Oral Tradition*, 1970: 54–55). Various fines, fees, and taxes were also collected. Everyone was expected to make a contribution to the state at the time of the *Odwira* festival. Denkyira local administration appears to have functioned effectively to ensure the upward flow of revenues to the various levels of government; strangers had to take an oath promising to turn over a just share on entering a mining district, and "there were supervisors who went around checking the quantities dug by each prospector" (*Oral Tradition*, 1970, 115, 96). Denkyira later created a central bureaucracy of officials who supervised finance and trade, the *Gyaasehene* or Exchequer, the *Batahene*, entrusted with gold dust and the right to carry on the king's trade, and the *Sanahene* or Treasurer who controlled revenue collection and disbursement, similar to the fiscal bureaucracy later developed in Asante.

Control over gold supplies also played a part in military expansion and the transformation of the kingdom into an empire. That Europeans seem to have remained somewhat ignorant of Denkyira territorial power until the eighteenth century is perhaps traceable to the fact that its earliest military probes were to the north, probably to control the trade and mines of the Bono-Techiman region. Denkyira next absorbed Adansi, her immediate neighbor across the Ofin. At about this time, Obuasi, center of one of the richest concentrations of reef gold in all West Africa, came under the direct political control of the *Denkyirahene* (*Oral Tradition*, 1970: 18). This was followed by more powerful military probes to the coast. Before 1690 Denkyira conquered Sefwi and Aowin to the west and Wassa and Assin-Twifo to the south. Akyem became an ally. Each of these conquered or client-states contained valuable auriferous lands, and by demanding heavy tribute in gold as well as slaves the *Denkyirahene* strengthened his treasury and secured the firearms needed for his power-

ful military machine. By the end of the seventeenth century Denkyira controlled most of the important trade routes between Asante and the southwestern and central states of the Gold Coast.

ASANTE

It is impossible in a short essay to do justice to Asante. But any analysis of connections between gold production and state formation in the Akan region must touch upon the Asante Union as the classic case. The general historical outline of events and causal forces which led to the founding of the Asante confederation in the late seventeenth century are well known: its resentment of the oppressive rule of Denkyira, how its model of state structure derived from the Kingdom of Akwamu, the advent of the firearms trade which activated a revolution in military organization, the leadership of Osei Tutu, and the cohesiveness of the *Oyoko* clan which united four of the main member states of the *amanto*.

To show a connection between the origins of a centralized monarchy and gold production and trade, several basic points need emphasis. First, that the heartland states of Asante—particularly Adansi, Kumasi and Bekwai, which run across the southwest-to-northeast Tarkwaian and Birrimian geologic system—were once studded with alluvial and reef gold deposits. It was no accident that the capital city of Kumasi was built on a site just two miles from the town of Tafo, which, according to Daaku, had been an important gold-mining site as well as a trading center since at least the early sixteenth century (Daaku, 1966: 12). In later years, lucrative gold mining was carried on at, or in the vicinity of, such sites as Adakwai-Koniyao, Obuom, Obenemasi, Ajensai, Manso-Nkwanta, Kontsiabu, Essuowin Mpesetia, Dompooasi, plus countless alluvial washing sites on the Ofin, Jimi, Oweri, Aroko Su, and Tano Rivers (Junner, 1935: 33–40). As with Denkyira, it seems probable that in early times some gold from these lands found its way into the northern Mande-Juula trading network between the forest fringe and the bend of the Niger as well as along the better-known southern route to European factories on the coast. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (particularly after the depletion of surface deposits at Wassa, Denkyira, and Ahanta), Asante became the most important gold-producing and exporting region of the Gold Coast hinterland. Although exact figures are unavailable, rough estimates put the annual average export of gold at about £50,000 for the period 1810–1880 (there was a resurgence of gold mining to compensate for the decline of the overseas slave trade), and Asante production was perhaps four-fifths of the total.

The importance of gold in the Asante economy and polity and its sym-

bolic significance in ceremonial and the socio-cultural system cannot be overemphasized. The bulwark of the Asante Union and the greater Asante Empire was its army. Without gold dust Asante rulers could not have procured the European firearms required for the maintenance of their formidable military power. Second, gold dust was the essential currency of the realm which served as a lubricant for both long-distance and internal trade and for the machinery of government. Third, we know from numerous eyewitness accounts that possession of gold dust, ingots, and gold jewelry, was a standard measurement for the wealth and social status of individuals (Bowdich, 1819: 395). A fourth point, essential for the argument here, is that gold production formed the base for the taxable wealth of the population and hence for the financial power of the state. As Wilks has shown (1975: 444–445) wealth as measured in gold and political power were virtually synonymous in Asante. It was conceived as flowing upwards from the land to the government in the form of “rents” and taxation and back to the people in the form of various disbursements for protection, ceremonies, internal improvements, dispensation of justice and other expenditures.

The principal sources of state revenues in Asante were (1) a poll tax levied after 1888 in metropolitan Asante at the rate of 1/10 of an ounce of gold per man; (2) a luxury tax imposed on any chief who increased the number of his gold ornaments; (3) confiscation of the gold of any man in disgrace; and (4) court fines and fees (Rattray, 1929: 108–112). There were, in addition, the death duties based on the rationale that the Asantehene was “the heir to the gold of every individual” (Bowdich, 1824: 319–321, 254; Rattray, 1929: 108); also a special gold tax raised as an emergency measure to 50 per cent during the reign of Mensa Bownsu in 1882. These in addition to such direct imposts as the war tax, an accession tax, an estate tax for important office-holders, and other emergency taxes levied for specific purposes, suggest that the revenue-gathering powers of the Asantehene and other paramount chiefs was theoretically almost unlimited. Except for court fines, these taxes are not mentioned in the Terray article, even though most of them are mentioned in standard primary sources.

Nor do these exhaust all revenue sources. Asante state taxation operated at several levels of the economy: on ordinary production from the land, on acquired movable property, on incomes, inheritances, and also on trade. Terray, of course, was completely wrong to deny that kings and chiefs could have derived a significant amount of “surplus” from control over external trade and long distance trade routes. As Fynn notes, “Asante trade in general was a state enterprise under the management of the Gyaasewahene” (Fynn, 1971: 117). At its way stations the central government inspected goods, exacted customs duties, and maintained

control over the network of major roads which extended spoke-like from the hub at Kumasi. In almost direct refutation of what Terray supposes about virtually free and open access to trade in Asante (1974, especially p. 323), we learn from numerous sources that traders returning to Kumasi from the coast via the Volta River route and from the north were expected to pay a toll on all goods in transit (Bowdich, 1824: 319–320; Rattray, 1929: 111). In fact, a high proportion of long distance trade had to be conducted through the Asantehene or his agents acting as middlemen, and there was always a handsome profit in trade for the state because foreign merchandise was valued in Kumasi at well below the current market price on the coast, while Asante goods were offered to out-of-country traders at as much as double their real worth (Rice and Wilks, 1976: 2). The *Bata fekuo* (Asante company of state traders) possessed many advantages over ordinary private traders because they used government funds for working capital, were exempt from duties and tolls, and had privileged access to markets for kola and slaves in the north and for European merchandise on the coast. Nor is it necessary to prove that the *Bata* had a monopoly over long-distance trade (though Wilks argues they were clearly moving in that direction during the period, 1830–1880). The main point for the argument here is that the company of traders was considered an arm of the Asante state and that a portion of their profits from assigned commercial activities were retained by the royal treasuries.

There remains the likelihood that kings or chiefs in certain Asante states (Kumasi, Bekwai, etc.) employed some of their own miners, perhaps organized under the goldsmiths or a branch of one of the state trading companies, to mine directly for gold on an occasional basis. There are brief allusions to such practice in Wilks. Also, Rattray, speaking of Bekwai, refers to “the people of Akotokyiso under the Kyidem Hene, who brought gold to the king once a year at the time of the *Odwira*” (Rattray, 1928: 162; Wilks, 1975: 436). Such a possibility does not refute the central argument of this paper that the receipts from such activities over the long run were relatively small: that any stool mining activities were probably carried on alongside the far larger number of excavations by ordinary free miners; and that any direct mining by state slaves was not the dominant source of state revenue. Oral data collected by Kwame Arhin on mining in Asante (1970: 101–109) mentions no direct involvement by the state even at Manso-Nkwanta, which in addition to being one of the major gold-mining centers of the realm, was a politically important outpost town under the direct control of the Asantehene. Instead it would appear that the Asante royal treasury took its share from mining at Manso-Nkwanta mainly from royalties plus taxes and fines on the profits of production by others.

As mentioned earlier, any account of a single segment of production,

such as gold mining, runs the risk of appearing to reduce in importance other sectors of the economy and other sources of state revenue. We are handicapped, moreover, by a lack of detailed ethnographic and historical information on internal slavery and servitude as a production system. Much more evidence about the organization and employment of new captives (particularly those in the service of large-scale slave owners), their workloads, the effects of assimilation and such matters will have to be unearthed before we can understand the modes of production in traditional Akan economic systems. On the basis of present knowledge there seems little doubt that the Asante politico-economic system was "highly exploitative" of the mass of the people (Rice and Wilks, 1976: 8). The extent to which such exploitation was a direct function of slavery, as opposed to other aspects of the political authority and social stratification systems is, however, by no means clear, since the general control of kings and chiefs over the land, people, and economic resources was considerable. There were a number of ways the labor of village communities could be acquired by the state, including *corvée* for roads and other public works, recruitment of men for military service, mobilization of the services of skilled craftsmen (weavers, blacksmiths, potters, basketmakers, sword makers, goldsmiths, and woodcarvers), as well as the employment of persons in royal households and state administration. Apart from the rent/taxes imposed on gold production emphasized in this essay, it is also likely that the ruling class of Asante appropriated some surplus from agriculture (at least enough to feed itself) plus exactions from tree crop production (kola, timber, and later, rubber and cocoa) and other revenue sources which the Terray article underemphasizes. In fact, a stronger case can be made for the concentrated use of slaves by the ruling class in agriculture (principally on the large farms of kings and caboceers) than for their employment in gold mining. Even so, the commonest form of slavery or servitude in the Akan states was patriarchal, the slaves being integrated into the kin-based mode of production. The several methods already described—royalties placed on production from the land (including mineral wealth and ivory collection), shares from ordinary food and forest crop production, innumerable taxes placed on personal income and wealth, special dues and incidences, obligations for labor service, imposts and profits from monopolistic controls over long-distance trade—indicate that the bulk of the state's material and labor revenues were obtained indirectly.

We lack the information to assess the proportions of Asante revenues collected from these various sectors. Yet we have not mentioned what was probably the most lucrative source of revenue for the Asante treasury: the gold and slaves which poured into Kumasi as plunder in war and from the imperial tribute-gathering mechanism of the Greater Asante Em-

pire. The quantities of gold taken by these methods were probably enormous. As noted above, the confiscation of the entire royal treasury of Bono-Techiman (c. 1722–1725) had been fundamental to the initial build-up of Asante wealth and later to the reform of the bureaucracy and fiscal system under Opoku Ware. At least one tradition suggests that the Asante-Akyem wars arose from resistance by Akyem against Asante imposition of royalties on gold mining. When we add to this the conquest, political incorporation, and levying of tribute in gold on virtually all the other great gold-bearing Akan regions to the north—Banda, Bono-Techiman, Gyaman—as well as those to the south—Denkyira (1701), Aowin (1715–1716) and Wassa (c. 1785)—we then see that the revenue base of the Asante Empire was formidable indeed.

GYAMAN

Finally, it is necessary to raise several questions about the accumulation of state “surplus” from gold in the kingdom of Gyaman—the centerpiece of Terray’s study. The pioneering work of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French ethnographers together with the more recent work of Agyeman, tells us a good deal about the early population movements which led to the settlement of the core area and the foundations of the kingdom. Located on the margins of the forest zone in what is today the northeast Ivory Coast, Gyaman was created by the Dormaa (Domma) people of Suman, a branch of the Brongs, who superimposed themselves on the indigenous G’Bin, Kulango and Nafana peoples some time after 1620 (Tauxier, 1921: 53–64, 79–90; Agyeman, 1966: 37).

Bonduku, which became the central city of the realm, had been an important market town for the gold trade to the north long before the establishment of the Brong kingdom. It lay astride the headwaters of two major river systems, the Tain and the Ba (together with its tributary, the Bakakora), which contained rich deposits of alluvial gold. We know little about the early monarchical structure of the Gyaman state or the inner dynamics of its expansion over surrounding territories. Basing his account partly on the oral tradition of the region, Agyeman says that the early Brong invaders modeled their state’s structure on the southeastern state of Akwamu, which was thought to have been their original homeland. He further suggests that the evolution of Gyaman institutions paralleled that of other great Akan states in their crucial reliance on military organization. As with the other states, the power of the Gyaman kingdom at its peak undoubtedly depended on the deployment of a unified military force, using infantry and cavalry, which rested in turn on the ability of particular Gyamanhene to command the continuing loyalty of division

chiefs and their regiments (Agyemen, 1966: 38–39). A reinforcing element, already mentioned in connection with the Bono-Mansu state, was the presence of a sizable community of Muslim traders (Juula) and of Muslim advisers at the court of the Gyamanhene (Tauxier, 1921: 68–69, 93–94). After the collapse of the Banda Kingdom, other Muslims came to Bonduku as refugees and strengthened it as a market center which surpassed Bighu as one of the key links in the Juula trading chain running north to Bobo-Dioulassou and Jenne (Tauxier, 1921: 68–69, 93–94; Goody, 1964: 196). Gyaman polity and society were complex. By a subtle process of military overlordship, coupled with territorial and fiscal controls and assimilation by intermarriage, the Dormaa (Brongs) gradually brought the local peoples under an Akan system of polity and culture; but the system remained pluralistic containing significant Muslim as well as indigenous elements (Kulango, Nafana, etc.).

Terray gives us little information on the political history or institutional structure of the Gyaman kingdom to support his point about state involvement in production. How centralized and how specialized was the bureaucratic apparatus of the Gyaman state? How effective and pervasive was its local administration? We know, for example, that succession to the kingship alternated between two royal dynasties, Yakasse and Zanzan. We know also that the site of the Gyamanhene's court or capital was not Bonduku and that it alternated between several smaller towns in the outlying hinterland. In certain locales the chiefs of the indigenous pre-Brong peoples (G'Bins, Kulangos, etc.) continued to exercise considerable autonomy in the conduct of their own affairs. What were the implications of the decentralizing tendencies and of other structural limitations on the effective power and stability of the central kingdom, and on the supposed capacity of the Gyamanhene to send cadres of "slave miners" to the richest corners of the great kingdom to mine for gold? Terray tells us very little about the extent of the effective jurisdictional authority of various Gyamanhene; and because his chronological time-frame is unclear much of his analysis seems vague, fragmentary, and unconvincing.

According to Agyeman (1966: 37), the height of Gyaman territorial power was probably reached during the reign of King Abo Kofi (c. 1720–1746). Yet most of Terray's data and analysis on state extraction of "surplus" from gold mining is drawn from the nineteenth century after the power of the central kingdom had contracted and after the supplies of gold in the central area surrounding Bonduku had been depleted. Terray agrees with a late nineteenth-century source (Braulot, 1893: 80) that one of the richest mining areas of the greater Gyaman region was Assikasso, and the suggestion (undocumented) left with the reader is that extraction of gold by the King's slaves was carried on regularly at that place (Terray, 1974: 327). However, Assikasso was at least four or five days' journey

south from Bonduku on the outer perimeters of the nominal kingdom, and the question is whether in this late period the Gyamanhene still had the power and resources to intervene directly (over the heads of local chiefs) in mining activities in that area. Another gold-mining district which Terray uses to substantiate his case is Nsoko. This almost certainly was not the small town of that name adjacent to Bonduku, but a second Nsoko (Nsakaw) located further east in the rich auriferous hills formerly controlled by Banda and the Bono-Techiman kingdom. Terray's argument is weakened by the fact that after 1819 Nsoko was no longer under the control of the Gyamanhene but had been absorbed as a part of the Greater Asante Empire.

Similarly, close examination shows that Terray (p. 328) relies almost entirely on the words of a single source, Joseph Dupuis, British Consul to Kumasi in 1820, for the core of his thesis concerning the use of thousands of royal slaves in deep-level reef gold mining in Gyaman (Dupuis, 1824, LVI-LVII). Since Dupuis did not visit the area (Nsoko) in person but relied on the word of an unnamed informant for his "eight or ten thousand slaves," such hearsay can hardly be taken as fact without corroboration from additional sources. But Nsoko was under the control of Asante, not Gyaman, for at least part of the period covered in the essay. Second, we know nothing about the type of slaves which are described. Third, and most glaring, Terray shifts his evidence, since Dupuis was referring to people on the banks of the Ba panning for alluvial gold, not to the kind of deep-level reef mining that would be necessary to sustain his hypothesis. That almost all other nineteenth-century European observers reported that the gold of Gyaman lay closer to the surface than gold in any other part of the Akan region suggests that shallow-pit surface mining was the commonest type here as elsewhere.

Other well-known French sources indicate that the primary conduits for transmission of "surplus" from producer to the ruling orders were the same or very similar in Gyaman to those in the other Akan kingdoms just described. Terray's handling of financial administration in Gyaman also leaves something to be desired. "To be sure," he concedes briefly in passing, "the gold prospector had to pay a toll to the chief of the land and the village chief whenever he operated outside the land of his own village . . ." (p. 327). As we have shown here, payments made to chiefs and kings based on production from the land are *the* central issue. Louis Tauxier's *Le Noir de Bonduku* (1921), which devotes considerable attention to land tenure relationships in Gyaman, makes clear that the accumulated gold surplus of both local rulers as well as the Gyamanhene derived from what he describes as their fundamental rights of "eminent domain" over the land. Tauxier writes that Brong chiefs had the authority to demand one day's gold-mining labor out of every seven from local inhabi-

tants (again *corvée*, not slavery), and a one-third share of total proceeds from stranger-miners. In addition, the Gyamanhene had the right to all nuggets discovered by any persons—a privilege which could add up to a very lucrative source of revenue indeed (Tauxier, 1921: 306–307). Judicial fines and various taxes were apparently also collected in gold. And tribute was also collected in gold from subject states, the amounts of which, although not measurable, undoubtedly contributed a sizeable portion of the gold in government coffers. Louis Binger, who passed through the region in the late 1880s and early 90s, noted that while some slaves were sent out in company with the Gyamanhene's friends and relatives to get gold, the two prime sources for state gold acquisition were taxation and plundering raids on neighboring territories.

Les parents, amis ou captifs de la famille royale, tout en vivant un peu aux dépens d'Ardjoumani, se créent des ressources en or, soit comme part de prise dans les razzias de captifs que fait ce souverain sur les frontières de l'Achanti, soit dans la perception de l'impôt, qui doit se faire, comme chez tous les peuples noirs, d'une façon plus ou moins arbitraire (Binger, II, 1892: 179).

Again, none of this is to deny that some direct mining by the king's slaves may have taken place. The question is how much was derived from direct state mining relative to other sources of gold acquired by the king and his elite? This essay gives evidence that the other sources were distinctly more important.

There is yet another problem not addressed in Terray's article, the relationship between Gyaman and Asante, especially the question of Asante intervention in Gyaman politics and tribute collection. About 1740 Gyaman was invaded and defeated by the armies of the expansionistic Opoku Ware, Asantehene 1720–1750 (Wilks, 1971: 446). Terray notes this fact (Terray, 1974: 326) very briefly in passing, but fails to follow out its important implications for his argument on gold mining and the material basis of state power in Gyaman. Although for the greater part of the period 1740 to 1818, direct Asante intervention in Gyaman affairs was probably spasmodic, it is nevertheless true that Gyaman remained in a client position of subordination to Asante and that Gyaman paid some tribute to Kumasi. More decisively, after the major revolt of the Gyamanhene Akinkra in 1818, the Asantehene imposed stricter controls over Gyaman in order to maintain his hegemony. As a consequence, a direct representative of the Kumasi government was made jointly responsible with the Gyamanhene for the government of all Gyaman, and an annual tribute in gold flowed into the Asante treasury (T.C. McCaskie, paper on "The Reality of Asante Power in the North," quoted by Fynn,

1974, 14). Terray should have made some attempt to show how far the state "surplus" of Gyaman was in fact drained off as tribute paid to the state apparatus of the Asante Empire. If nineteenth-century writers are to be believed, then tribute paid by Gyaman was one of the major sources of the gold wealth of Asante.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a survey of gold mining in the pre-colonial Akan region and an assessment of differing interpretations about the connections between methods of production at the local level and the acquisition of surplus product by the state. Terray's interpretation, while cleverly argued, contains a number of flaws as an explanatory model. He presents little data to support his assertions about the use of state-controlled slave labor by royal agents in deep-level mining. His crucial assertions that (1) deep underground shaft mining for reef gold was the most productive component of traditional mining; (2) that the work was so difficult that it could be carried on only by slave labor; and (3) that such labor could have been mobilized only by kings and chiefs, are conjecture. His most relied-on source for the use of slaves is Joseph Dupuis, who based his account of "eight or ten thousand slaves" mining alluvial gold near Nsoko on the banks of the River Ba (no deep shafts are mentioned) on secondhand information which, even if it could be confirmed by other data sources, does not support the edifice which Terray builds on it. We have cited documentary and oral data from numerous sources on mining techniques employed in other states throughout the Gold Coast hinterland to support the conclusion that traditional gold mining was carried out mainly by free family labor with slaves used as an adjunct to the kin-based labor unit.

Terray seriously underemphasizes the importance of Akan state administrative organization, land tenure relationships and taxation as the bases for government economic power and finance. The present paper gave evidence for the crucial importance of the control exercised by traditional rulers over access to the land, and particularly their right to a share in the production of mineral wealth through the *abusa* share system. Another important source of state revenue, particularly in the more centralized states such as Asante, was the central government's power to appropriate wealth derived from production and trade through various forms of imposts and taxation. Not every Akan kingdom possessed Asante's highly sophisticated and specialized tax-gathering mechanisms, but they did employ the usual political forms, and so collected court fees and fines, tribute, customs tolls, and taxes, and they raided for booty and plunder. It is doubtful that the Akan rulers depended for revenue in any

fundamental way on direct involvement in mining using their own slaves. Mining was a slow and arduous process (often with small return). Many quicker and more effective methods of taxation and other revenue sources lay open to them. Thus, even in smaller decentralized polities, where the formalities of regular taxation might be ignored, evidence shows that petty chiefs and their functionaries could enter a mining area at any time they chose and forcibly confiscate all gold held by miners and their families (J. Müller, 1881, *Basel Records*; also Boyle, 1874: 36). I certainly do not deny the existence of a patriarchal form of slavery as an important element in the Akan socio-political system—as a source of food supply for kings and chiefs, or as an adjunct to family labor in ordinary agricultural production—but I find the notion of a basic and essential “slave mode of production” in a concentrated state-managed mining sector undocumented and therefore unconvincing.

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